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CONSIDERATIONS

ADDRESSED

TO THE CLERGY,

ON

The Propriety of their bearing Arms,

AND

APPEARING IN A MILITARY CAPACITY.

BY A COUNTRY INCUMBENT.
M^r. E. Spencer.



• BATH •

PRINTED BY S. HAZARD, FOR THE AUTHOR;

And sold by Messrs. RIVINGTON's, St. Paul's Church-Yard;
CADELL & DAVIES, Strand; and DILLY, Poultry, London;
FLETCHER & PARSONS, and COOK, Oxford; DEIGHTON,
Cambridge; BULGIN & SHEPPARD, Bristol; and all other
Bookfellers.

1798.





CONSIDERATIONS, &c.



AT this important crisis, every man who loves his Country will feel himself bound to contribute towards its defence.—The armed Associations, entered into with so much cheerfulness, are certainly a strong indication of the just sentiments of the Public; and the zeal with which the Clergy have, in most instances, concurred to promote the general good, entitles them to commendation. The propriety however of their actually bearing arms, and appearing in military array, seems to be very questionable; and much doubt may be raised whether it be not a measure of very *pernicious* tendency.

It is the genius of the new philosophy to abolish every discrimination of character and profession; and many are imperceptibly influenced by its maxims, who have not

professedly adopted its principles. In no point of view does the mischief of this scheme appear more conspicuous, than in its influence upon every thing which has reference to Religion. The character of its Ministers in particular, is of high consequence to the general effect of Religion; and whatever tends to make them forget the discriminating peculiarities of their profession, or to place them in a condition different from what is essential to the sanctity of their official engagements, proportionably favours the prevailing neglect of Religion, which all good men seriously deplore.

As to the fitness of the Clergy serving in a military capacity, the negative may be strongly inferred from the express command of God respecting the Jewish Priesthood;—from the general character and manners of the Clergy in the best ages of the Christian Church;—and from the exemptions granted by the Legislature of this kingdom to the Ministers of Religion in general, from those services in their own persons, which have been deemed inconsistent with their religious duties.

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Nothing can be more explicit than the divine injunction to Moses, as recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Numbers.—Moses was directed to number from twenty years old and upwards, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel. The sum of the number of persons in the several families and tribes was accordingly taken (v. 3.). But the *Levites* were not numbered amongst them. “*For the Lord had spoken unto Moses, saying, only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Testimony.*” (v. 47—50.).—It appears from this injunction, that the *discrimen rerum divinarum et humanarum* was, even in war, to be scrupulously preserved; and that the Ministers of Religion were to be employed in those services only, which continued to call the general attention to that reverence which is due to the Divine Majesty.—I am aware it will be said, that the Jewish œconomy was ceremonial; and that its obligation is now abolished:—Both which are readily granted. But, it is still maintained,

that the character attached to the Ministers of the true Religion, and the perpetual obligations they are under, never to relinquish the duties, nor depart from the decorum of that character, are equally binding, by whatever ritual their ministerial functions are performed, whether ceremonial or evangelical.—In the matter of bearing arms, and serving in a military capacity; Divine Wisdom thought fit to make the distinction, by a particular injunction, in the only instance in which God expressly established his true worship amongst a people as a Nation, and who that believes the authority of divine revelation can entertain a doubt of the propriety of that distinction?

The qualifications of Christian Ministers are given us at large in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; and they are such as are very remote from admitting the possibility of an accommodation to military engagements. From the time when the Gospel was first preached unto the world, it endured for three centuries the fury and persecution of the civil power. Its Ministers,
eminent

eminent for their piety, their charity, and their diligence, were marked as the victims of the most malignant cruelty. Yet the Christian Religion continued to gain ground; though it had no arms of defence but the faith,--the prayers,--and the patient sufferings of those who embraced it. In this state of things it seems most probable, that those were selected for the sacred ministry who were not subject to military service. We do not find that any of the Clergy, either of the eastern or western Church, were questioned upon that account. Many of them suffered death for the faith of Christ, but they were never called upon to bear arms; and we are sure that their sentiments and manners were very remote from those which became men engaged in military services. The Faithful, however, were enjoined by Apostolic authority to be obedient to the civil Magistrate, in all things which did not intrench upon their Christian obligations, and to pray for Kings, and for all that were in authority.

But though the Religion of Christ did

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not make its entrance into the world as a national Religion ; yet there was nothing in its principles or in its duties inconsistent with that relation : nay, it was evidently calculated to secure and meliorate the Government, and to improve the condition of the subject ; and when it was adopted by the civil power, it actually *did* produce these effects. The Imperial authority also received the Ministers of Christ under its protection, and granted them such immunities and privileges, as were analogous to those granted by God to the Priesthood of a Religion established by himself. Whatever abuses those immunities and privileges suffered in the lapse of ages, these arose from the faults of unworthy individuals, and not from the original constitution. It was not however till Gothic ignorance and barbarism had overspread the western empire, and the papal tyranny had established its dominion, that we have any traces of military Ecclesiastics. When that was the case, the influence of Christianity was very partial and defective. It did indeed, in many instances, controul the ferocity of a barbarous people ;
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but in other respects it was constrained to give place to their manners. Under such circumstances it is not surprising to find some, who bore the character of Ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, following the hostile banner, clad in the armour, and unsheathing the sword of the warrior. But these were sad aberrations from their proper character; and they have been industriously held forth by the enemies of our holy Faith, to the dishonour of the Clergy, and to the prejudice of the Christian profession.

By the Laws and Customs of this Kingdom, Clergymen are exempted from Civil Offices, such as those of Constable, Tythingman, and the like. The general sense of the Legislature seems to be, that those Civil Offices which require any violence or coercion in the execution of them, do not comport with the character of men, whose weapons are of a spiritual nature, and are designed to operate by persuasion and example only, upon the understandings and consciences of mankind. But though the civil condition of Christian Ministers
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may be changed by the protection of the State, it was never implied by that protection that they were less bound, or that they were to consider themselves as less bound to act in the same temper, and conform to the same manners, which adorned their early predecessors in the Christian Church.

Now from all this it seems to follow very clearly, that the Ecclesiastical and Military characters are incompatible in the same person; and that to assume the latter, is in fact tacitly to abdicate the former.

It will perhaps be asked, are the Clergy then to do nothing towards the defence and support of the Government, which takes them under its protection, and grants them their civil privileges? Are they to be inactive, when their Country is in danger of a violent attack from an enemy, who threatens it with destruction?—Most certainly, under such circumstances and such obligations, they are bound to act—and to act with vigour. They are not to flinch from danger in the hour of difficulty; but they are still
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to act *officially*. This was the direction of God by Moses ; “ *And it shall be when ye
 “ are come nigh unto the battle, that the Priest
 “ shall approach and speak unto the people,
 “ and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye
 “ approach this day unto the battle against
 “ your enemies ; let not your heart faint, fear
 “ not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terri-
 “ fied because of them : For the Lord your
 “ God is he that goeth with you to fight for
 “ you against your enemies to save you.” (Deut.
 xx. 2, 3, 4.)—The proper duties of the Christian Minister are not to be intermitted. They are to be seriously discharged even amidst the bustle and anxiety of military preparations. They are then peculiarly requisite to preserve in the minds of men that reverence of the Divine Majesty—that sense of the spirit and duties of Christianity, which will not fail to controul and counteract even the miseries of war. The Clergy should moreover be ready to undertake any of those numerous duties and offices, however laborious or perilous, which persons not in the *actual use* of arms may discharge for the public good. They may, if circumstances
 require,*

require, continue at their respective residences to secure or remove property in danger of falling into the hands of the enemy, as mentioned in the Second Article of the Proposals printed by authority. They may assist in the removal of the inhabitants; and be employed on various other occasions in which their knowledge may be of general or local utility. All this may be done without abdicating for a moment their official character; and may be so managed, as to promote the best objects of their ministry, by communicating instruction, consolation, or encouragement of a religious nature, under circumstances the most pressing upon individuals.

When Dr. Burnet (afterwards Bishop of Salisbury), with a full conviction of the hazard of the undertaking to himself in particular, attended the Prince of Orange (afterwards King William the Third) to England, he attended him as his Chaplain. On the arrival of the Prince in London, the care of the Roman Catholics was committed to the Doctor, to protect them from the outrage of
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the populace. This was an office consistent with his character as a Clergyman, and certainly as conducive to the public tranquillity, as if he had mounted guard at the gate of St. James's or of Whitehall. Much more proper, it is conceived, was such a line of action, than that of some less scrupulous Dignitaries, who have occasionally exchanged the Lawn for the military Scarlet; without perhaps reflecting on the obligations of their profession in all its bearings, or considering the dangerous tendency of such examples.

If at any time it becomes the Clergy of the Christian Church to attend to the obligations of their profession, and in every respect to act accordingly, *this* is the moment. They ought to know, that if in any respect they deviate from the rules of decorum, many who seem pleased with them on that account, are on other occasions forward to avow their contempt of the whole Order—their disapprobation of its privileges,—and their hatred of Christianity itself. The first step taken by the French Convention towards suppressing
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the public profession of the Christian Religion, was to blend the Clergy indiscriminately with the mass of other citizens; and to this end they inhibited Ecclesiastics from appearing publicly in any official habit.—^x Should the judgments of God permit that People to prevail here, we have almost saved them the trouble of such an inhibition. The general disuse of the Clerical habit—and that even upon some *public occasions*, will be considered by many, it is to be feared, as a symptom of greater indifference to the more essential parts of the character than formerly prevailed; and not an indication that they are *now* more seriously attended to. It will afford a sad presage of the approaching ruin of any particular branch of the Christian Church, if those who should principally promote its best interests become indifferent to any of the proper discriminations of their character; or adopt such measures in defence of their profession, as favour the schemes of their enemies who wish for its annihilation.

By what means it may please God to purge the Church of Christ from that spirit

of
** See Proceedings of the National Assembly in France
 April 9th 1792 recorded in the Gentleman's Magazine
 for that Month.*

of indifference and irreligion which so generally prevails, is at present hidden from us. But we know that those, who have neglected or abused their privileges whether civil or religious, have been frequently punished by the loss of them. Let not the Clergy of this nation contribute through incogitancy, towards bringing forward such a calamity : But let them in these perilous times assert their true character, and by the grace of God emulate the devotion, the piety, the fortitude which distinguished those holy men who sustained the violence of Pagan persecution ; and of those, who, when the Goths, the Vandals, and the Huns ravaged the Roman Empire, endured that shock of barbaric outrage, which for a season almost suppressed the profession of our most holy Religion. In due time the Faith of Christ will prevail in its genuine purity ; and against the Church of Christ the gates of Hell shall not ultimately prevail.

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P O S T S C R I P T.

WHEN the foregoing Considerations were prepared for the Press, the public Papers announced that the Right Reverend the Bishops had signified, that they judged it improper for Clergymen to enroll themselves in Volunteer Corps, or accept of a military Commission.—Their Lordships deserve the thanks of every Friend of the Church of England for declaring so seasonably their disapprobation of a measure, which, it was to be feared, might in some districts have become too prevalent; and would certainly have operated to the general prejudice of Christianity.

